American Miners' Association of West Belleville: The first U.S. national labor Union, and arguably, the beginning of the modern labor movement

By Jack Le Chien

A handful of English coal miners immigrated to the small coal mining community of West Belleville in the late 1850's and used the Chartist movement in their home country as a model to energize the first multi-state national labor union in the United States. The London Working Men's Association in 1836 established broad goals for the betterment of the working class that included "every legal means to place all classes of society in possession of their equal political and social rights." (1) This became the basis of the six points adopted by the Chartist in England.

Daniel Weaver, an Englishman, and Thomas Lloyd, a Welshman, had been influenced by the Chartist philosophy before they arrived in West Belleville in 1860. West Belleville – bounded by Richland Creek, North and South Sixteenth Street, West "E" and the St. Louis and Southern Illinois Railroad/Cairo Short Line Railroad on the south side of West Main – was laid out by Theodore Hilgard in the 1830's and had become a coal mining village by the mid 1850's due to the coal hauling abilities of railroads. The Belleville and Illinoistown Railroad cut through the residential area of West Belleville on the north side of West Main.

Union organizers had a negative image dating from the 1840's, according to "A History of Coal Miners of the U.S.,": "These unions were looked upon with no favor for many years, being regarded as a foreign importation, and contrary to the genius and spirit of American institutions…Leaders of unions were held up to the hatred and hostility of the public, and denounced as blatherskites and demagogues, too lazy to work themselves and unwilling to allow self-respecting men to work."

Weaver and Lloyd had found fertile soil in West Belleville to plant the seeds of Chartist idealism. "The mines of the Belleville tract, owing to their proximity of the St. Louis market, were more rapidly developed than any others in the state. The pioneer miners of the Belleville tract were immigrants from the British coalfields who brought with them a devoted attachment to the principle of trade unions, their minds having been quickened and hardened by the agitation of Chartism." (2)

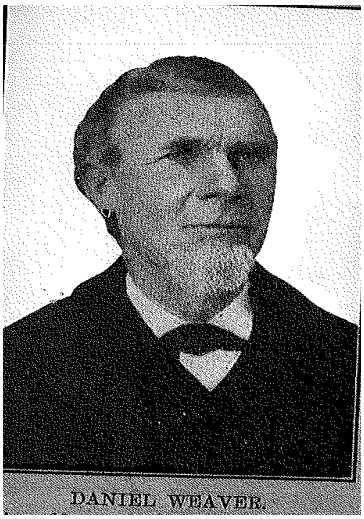
The May 3, 1855, edition of the *St. Clair Tribune* of Belleville reported "large quantities of coal from the mines in West Belleville is daily being sent forward by the cars to the St. Louis market."

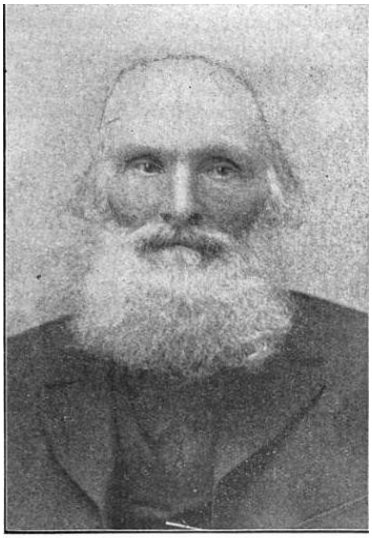
Land purchases along rail lines from Belleville to St. Louis reflected the increasing interest of investors and politicians. Colonel J.L.D. Morrison, who had served as a state legislator and later congressman, was "the dominant figure of the Belleville and Illinoistown Railroad," according to the book celebrating Belleville's 150th anniversary, *Reflections :sesquicentennial, 1814-1964.* "We have recently heard of the sale of two or three tracts of land about two miles from our city, located on the Belleville railroad which sold for $90 to $100 per acre…Colonel J.L.D. Morrison has bought five acres of land adjoining West Belleville for $400 per acre." (3)

The *St. Clair Tribune* estimated 194,000 bushels of coal were transported in April of 1857 on the Belleville and Illinoistown Railroad, and in the May 15, 1857 edition, the newspaper reported business was good and "quite a number of coal pits have been recently opened on the railroad, within a mile or two of this city, and coal of the best quality is taken therefrom. The coal business now forms a large item in the trade of Belleville and doubtless is very lucrative to all engaged in it." The *Belleville Democrat* newspaper of February 20, 1858, estimated if coal sold for 7 cents per bushel the land "in and around Belleville Township contained coal worth $334,800,000 at a depth of 10 to 100 feet below the surface. We want now capitalists and manufacturers to come in and develop these resources." Lucrative indeed, but not lucrative to all who were engaged in mining, as Weaver and Lloyd would assert three years later when they organized the Miners' Association at West Belleville.

Weaver, the MA secretary, was "raised in the mines and was, as a matter of course, self-educated…He had taken part in the Chartist movement in England, which may have hurried his departure…He was a deep thinker, logical reasoner, forcible in expression, and a plain, energetic speaker, who brought convictions to the minds of those listening to him." (4) Lloyd, MA president, "was a man of mature years, an energetic worker and a forcible speaker, and was the chief support of Weaver in getting the organization established." (5) Other newcomers also assisted Weaver and Lloyd. "An Irishman named Martin Boyle became one of the most active, eloquent and successful organizers. These men were assisted by a German, named Roeser, who organized and brought into the fold all the German miners in and around the district." (6)

A coal miners' strike in West Belleville began January 28, 1961, not because of a demand for a pay increase, but rather, to protest the mine owners' imposition of a second reduction of one-quarter cent per bushel that would have decreased the miners' pay to two cents per bushel. Weaver said the second reduction gave purpose to organizing a union.


DANIEL WEAVER.


THOMAS LLOYD.

"The bosses now rue the infliction of that second reduction. We silently and sadly submitted to the first fourth cent; but in a few weeks it was repeated and hence our union." (7)

Weaver and Lloyd were joined by another Englishman, Ralph Green, who immigrated to Belleville in 1859. He was named treasurer of the MA. The leadership invited miners from St. Louis to join the union since they shared the same market. Weaver issued a call for a convention.

"Union is the great fundamental principle by which every object of importance is to be accomplished. Man is a social being, and if left to himself, in an isolated condition, would be one of the weaker creatures; but, associated with his kind, he works wonders. Men can do jointly what they cannot do singly, and the UNION of minds and hands – the concentration of their power – becomes almost omnipotent." (8)

Weaver's rhetoric sought to inspire men to a higher purpose, and he delivered his message as if it were a sermon from a pulpit.

"How long then will Miners remain isolated, antagonistic to each other? Does it not behoove us, as Miners, to use every means to elevate our position in society, by a reformation in character, by obliterating all personal animosities and frivolous nationalities, abandoning pernicious habits and degrading pursuits, and striving for the attainment of pure and high principles and generous motives, which will fit us to bear a manly, useful and honorable part in the world. Our unity is essential to the attainment of our own rights and the amelioration of our present condition; and our voices must be heard in the legislative halls of our land." (9)

Weaver also desired to improve the public image of the coal miner.

"In laying before you, therefore, the objects of this Association, we desire it to be understood that our objects are not merely pecuniary, but to mutually instruct and improve each other in knowledge, which is power; to study the laws of life; the relation of labor to capitol; politics, municipal affairs, literature, science or any other subject relating to the general welfare of our class." (10)

High on the MA's list of issues was the miners' working conditions. The preamble to the Miners' Association constitution listed some of the health hazards of mining.

"The working miners are subjected to manifold dangers from explosions and insecure roofs; also from fire damps and other noxious gases, the result of imperfect ventilation, as well as to accidents arising from other cause consequent upon the parsimony of employers, whose objects it would seem to be the increase of the volume of their capital, without reference to the fearful loss of life, limb and health, which is the cost of such increase…" (11) Both Belleville weekly English language newspapers carried frequent stories of injuries caused by roof slate falling onto a miner, or the malfunction of equipment that transported coal and miners from the pit to the surface.

3

Several types of poisonous mine air threatened miners' health in the 1860's.

MINER AT WORK IN THICK VEIN COAL.

"Fire damp is an explosive gas found in shaft mines. Black damp air is purest in the morning because circulation is renewed with absence of miners; but in the afternoon, or towards quitting time it becomes so foul that the miners' lamps will no longer burn, and the miners themselves suffer with severe headaches. A miner can remain for some time in his room (a mining method called 'room and pillar' created a working space and pillar for support of the mine ceiling) before he becomes insensible after his light goes out. In white damp, however, he will fall insensible. And if not speedily removed, will die, while his lamp will continue burning. White damp is largely formed from the powder used in the mine for blasting out the coal, and from the waste or wrought-out parts of the mine, particularly where breeding fires are liable to break out in the gob" (a refuse pile in the mine.) (12) Damp is believed to be from the German, dampf, or vapor.

The first crude attempt to create ventilation involved a furnace, which was a coal fire at the bottom of the shaft that would create hot air which rose up the shaft and drew cold, fresh air in through another shaft. Drawbacks of this approach were the

potential fire hazard of a furnace in a coal mine and the extra labor required to dig a second shaft for the fresh air column.

The miner had to undercut the face of the seam three feet. This could cause coal to fall on him if there were voids or other impurities in the seam.

Besides toxic air and the accumulated physical injuries from digging coal, miner's asthma, or black lung disease, caused by breathing coal dust over long periods, would slowly steal the miner's breath from his lungs, causing a gradual deterioration and prolonged suffering.

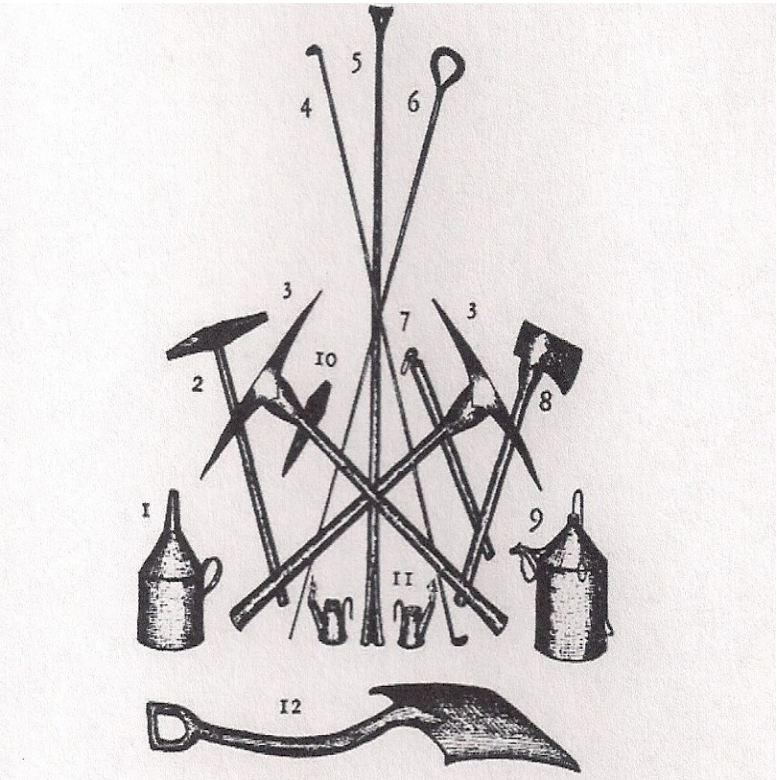
As the West Belleville miners organized their union, the nation waited for the effects of Abraham Lincoln's November 1860 election to develop. Within three months, the federal government would issue the call for troops at the beginning of the Civil War. Some patriotic miners joined "Captain Challenor's Company K Sappers and Miners of Colonel Dougherty's Regiment." (13)

Another dynamic of the war came into play. "As the American coal mining industry expanded in the

1860's, the ensuing shortage of skilled miners was exacerbated by wide spread enlistment in the Union Army. News of the labor scarcity soon reached the ear of the British miner." (14)

1860's miners used hand tools and blasting powder to remove coal from the earth. Early West Belleville mining was a mixture of shaft and slope mining. Shaft mines used a gin and windlass. A gin is a tripod that held a wood barrel, the windlass, over the shaft opening. A horse or animal was attached to a rope which wrapped around the windlass to raise the coal from the ground. Later, when steam powered engines were introduced, an engineman would be in charge of the winding engine that lowered and raised the cage that contained men and coal. The banksman loaded and unloaded the cage, giving a signal to the engineman when the cage was ready for the next operation.

"Underground mines are either shaft, slope or drift, which refers to the type of opening used to remove the coal from the mine. In shaft mines the coal is removed through a vertical shaft. Slope designates mines in which the coal is removed via a sloping incline from the ground surface to the mining level. In slope mines, miners and equipment may use either the slope or vertical shaft to get into the mine. A drift mine is an underground mine that is excavated where the coal outcrops in the side of a bluff or the highwall of a surface mine." (15)



TOOLS OF THE HAND MINER OF THE 1860's

(1) Powder flask, (2) Sledge, (3) Pick, (4) Scraper, (5) Churn drill and tamper, (6) Blasting needle, (7) Cartridge pin, (8) Ax, (9) Oil can, (10) Wedge, (11) Lamp, (12) Shovel

The sketch above is reproduced from Andrew Roy's History of the Coal Miners of the United States, *published in 1903.*

The *Belleville Advocate* reported February 1, 1861: "The coal miners of St. Clair County held a delegate meeting in West Belleville on Monday last (January 28) at which measures were taken toward the formation of a General Union." The *Belleville Democrat* noted February 2 the miners met again on January 31 to again take up the details of organizing with "the afternoon session chiefly engrossed by organizing a Miners' Association, embracing among other objects, literary, and social improvement."

Weaver and Lloyd understood the importance of organizing a regional union because the largest consumers of Belleville coal were the industries of St. Louis. Consolidating the aims of miners in St. Clair and Madison counties with miners in St. Louis would strengthen their leverage in talks with mine owners.

The newspaper reported Weaver and Lloyd identified two issues during negotiations with owners.

"The operative's complaint of an attempted reduction of a quarter cent per bushel, and also that by the system of measurement adopted by their employers, they are subjected to a further reduction of about thirty per cent. They intend to petition the Legislature for the appointment of an inspector, to weigh all the coal sent from the mines, that they may receive pay for all they dig. Their demands appear to be reasonable and should be met in the proper spirit." (16)

The miners met again February 4 and the *Belleville Democrat* wrote:

"The Miners' Association is now in full blast, and gaining accessions to its membership daily…The reports of the delegates who had visited the Miners in Missouri was then received; from which it appeared that they had met with an enthusiastic reception, and the most liberal assurances of support. The delegation spoke in the highest terms of the Miners of Missouri and elected a deputation to Missouri to attend meetings of the Miners there, and receive the subscriptions, which might be made in aid of the men on strike."

Weaver wrote to the *Belleville Democrat* February 18: "I am happy to inform you that our 'strike' is terminated, and the issue is successful; the Bosses have met us to-day and conceded all we required, and we have agreed to resume work forthwith. Hurrah for Union."

Meanwhile, 1,400 signatures were obtained from Belleville citizens on a petition "for enactment of a law to insure honest weight and measure of coal mined." The miners' petitions described the injustice.

"The coal is sent to the bank (top) in boxes, varying in size at the different mines, and some are weighed and others go for measure, but in either case, we have no guarantee for our just dues. Our employers tell us our boxes weigh or measure so many bushels, when in fact they contain fully one-fourth more than the quantity for which our employers pay us, and we are compelled to submit for the reason that we are not provided with any means of redress." (17)

The weights and measure law was passed in mid-February, 1861, and required appointment of "coal sealers" who would "determine and mark by brand or otherwise on the box its capacity as a measure of coal, for which services the coal sealers shall be allowed three dollars a day, to be paid by the employer." (18)

The hand miner's daily production was often a contentious issue between owner and miner. A bushel of coal weighs 80 pounds, so it took 25 bushels to the ton. Andrew Roy, A Du Quoin, Illinois, miner who authored two books on coal mining in the United States, described the daily physical

punishment inflicted on a hand miner's body.

"In cutting a seam, a good hand man struck an average of 40 blows per minute with his pick, which, incidentally, is the same rate as that of the first successful mine machines…The amount dug each day depended on the hardness and texture of coal, the amount of impurities in it and the height of the seam and skill of the miner. An average miner could produce five or six tons a day in an eight or nine hour day in a five to six foot seam. In a four foot seam, three and a half tons." (19)

Miners' Association members estimated the average daily yield at 75 bushels per miner; mine owners contended miners could dig 120 to 150 bushels in a work day. At four cents a bushel, mine owners calculated a day's wages to be $4.80 to$6.00. The owners issued a statement declaring "this certainly is not only fair, but even munificent earnings for a man who has no capital invested, and no risks involved." (20)

But, another factor affected the tonnage mined; not all of the coal was acceptable to the owners.

"It is important to remember that the miner was paid only for course coal. The fine coal was left in the mine…A hand riddle (a hand tool with tines that would sift large pieces) was used for this purpose in the Belleville field and probably in other places. One miner shoveled the coal into the riddle held by another miner, who sieved the coal through and placed the remainder in the coal car." (21)

Other sources of energy controlled the price of coal. The *St. Clair Tribune,* March 8, 1856, reported coal "has had to compete with the liberal supply of hickory and oak wood in our market. Wood at an average cost of three dollars per cord, cut to hand for use, will not permit coal to get beyond 8 to 10 cents per bushel."

Weaver used the Belleville newspapers to inform the public of the progress of the union campaign. He wrote, a recent meeting of owners did not produce an owners' agreement and "it all ended in smoke." He commented on a proposal by owners to set a bi-state price for coal sold in the St. Louis market.

"There is no such thing as unanimity amongst the bosses. True, Missouri bosses appear anxious that a minimum, but not a maximum price of coal in the city should be established, and many of the miners themselves think we ought to co-operate with the bosses to effect this purpose. I am of a different opinion. The

regulation of the selling price of coal is beyond our prerogative. If our employers pay us for digging the price we demand, and as the same time guarantee to us our just weight and measure, we can claim no more." (22)

In the same letter written at Ogles Station four miles west of Belleville, Weaver reminded the miners of their success in the short span of six weeks.

"Our Association is now powerful for good. Upwards of 500 members stand good on the books. Union has worked wonders already. Since bosses were unable to co-operate we must set them an

example. The Germans now are joining us by thirties and forties. Confidence in them has taken root; some of the bosses have made it a point to discharge their old hands under various pretexts, to make room for Germans who were not in the Unions: but the incomers are as bad as the outgoers. They begin to see that our aims are right, and objects pure. We think, as well as work. Our cause is theirs; our interests are identical." (23)

But, Weaver urged miners to use restraint after an incident in which a mine owner was assaulted by miners because the owner opposed the weights and measure law.

"One unpleasant feature among us is a restless desire to push into action rash and untimely measures; deeming a strike the panacea for every ill…From menaces, too, we must carefully abstain. Let no man suppose that the Union will justify or defend bad conduct. We must keep in constant recognition the rights of bosses as well as our own." (24)

Martin Boyle, a Belleville miner, was a vocal supporter of the union during the strike and that cost him his job when the strike ended. The MA then employed Boyle to lobby the legislature for passage of the Coal Sealers Law and to organize new lodges in Madison and St. Clair counties.

In another newspaper letter from Ogles Station dated March 30, 1861, Weaver again counseled restraint and cited his experience in England.

"What have the Chartists of England done for reform? They have made enough noise and agitation but what have they achieved?...I am free to assert that their extreme demands, 'The Charter and no surrender,' and the unanimous and total rejection of, and opposition to every installment movement of reform short of the 'six points,' has rendered them, as a body, effete. Their objects were good, but their general policy was reprehensible. A merchant would be considered crazy in refusing an installment of a debt, especially if it gave him increased facilities to recover the rest of his dues. Not so the Chartists. They stand where they did twenty years ago. Every human enterprise should prove a lesson for us. It is not

wise at all times to demand at once all that is due, but what is attainable. Extremes don't pay." (25)

Weaver's April 27, 1861, letter in the *Belleville Democrat* encouraged his members to vote, but to be informed before voting. His words sounded a cautionary tone.

"It is a precious boon to the working man who has intelligence sufficient to appreciate its value, and knowledge adequate to its exercise…To the man who has escaped from the Old World's tyrannies and inequalities, where he was taxed heavily enough but not represented, such a blessing is incalculable.…Too many of my own class are both ignorant and careless of political matters generally, and if they do possess and exercise the franchise, it is often to abuse it." (26)

The town of West Belleville had been established in 1852. The town board of trustees adopted an ordinance in 1853 requiring able-bodied males between 21 and 50 years of age to volunteer three days per year for repair of the streets.

Indiscriminate coal mining caused public safety issues that were addressed in an 1857 West Belleville ordinance.

"No more coal mines, shafts or tunnels shall be dug within the limits of West Belleville. (27) The ordinance complained of "mine owners undercutting of soil, blocking streets and endangering children and persons passing the streets at night"; and that "mining had cut the supply of water from the wells of citizens who own property in the neighborhood of such mines." (28)

Miners' social life in West Belleville centered on drinking: fifteen taverns were located on West Main Street between Eighth and Fourteenth Streets with five more taverns mixed into the side streets of the residential area. The miners first union meeting was at West Belleville House Saloon, Eighth and West Main. Sam Swancutt's Miners Arms tavern at South Eleventh and St. Louis and Southern Railroad tracks also was a popular spot for eating, imbibing and dancing. The largest property and meeting place for union members was Louis Huff's Dance Hall and Beer Garden at 918 West Main, which featured a block-long area of trees with a bandstand and outdoor seating. The picture shows the dance hall at far right (later to be the home of the Turnverein). It was taken before the hill was graded, indicating the original appearance of the beer garden.

Huff's, also known as West Belleville Garden, was the site of a fundraising event for the Illinois Fire Company of West Belleville. "A fine band of music will be in attendance. At night the ceremonies will be music, hilarity, cotillion and waltz." (29)

Miners also provided entertainment as featured performers in boxing matches and other tests of physical endurance. James Anderson challenged Samuel Goalby to a coal digging contest. A newspaper reported the contest.

"Dig an entry seven feet in height, eight feet wide and twelve in depth, containing over 700 bushels of coal. Each was to work eight hours a day and each to receive twenty dollars for the job…Anderson the first day sprained his left wrist… and so troublesome was it to him that afterwards he was obliged to rely on his right arm almost altogether…Goalby…at the end of the first day found he had worn a blister to the bone in one of his hands…but the difference in the time (between the two competitors) was only about 15 minutes and showed the contestants pretty well matched." (30)

The match took three and a half days, so if the dig produced 700bushels per miner, that meant each miner averaged 200 bushels per day, almost twice the average hand miner's daily production.

Sometimes a work injury affected scheduled entertainment, as this report indicates about an event at Alma Mines, a mile west of O"Fallon.

"The wrestling match which should have come off at Alma on the O and M RR on the 13th of July, has been indefinitely postponed by reason of one of the contestants having been severely wounded with a blow from a pick." (31)

Two stations on the railroad were cited in this report of a debate conducted for miners.

"A very spirited discussion took place at Reeb's Station, between the Philo Independent Literary Society of that place, and the Union Debating Society of Ogle's settlement-the latter being a challenging party…The question discussed was 'Resolved that artificial beauty is more attributable to the human eye than natural beauty.'… There was considerable interest manifested by the audience, which was respectable in number." (32)

Baseball had become a popular sport in the 1860's, as this report recorded.

"A Grand Picnic will be given at Gartside's No. 3 (at Alma Mines) for the benefit of the White Star Base Ball Club. There will be a Matched Game played in the forenoon between the White Star and the East St. Louis Base Ball Clubs. In the afternoon will be dancing, with good music and refreshments." (33)

Holiday observations were times of community celebration and the Fourth of July was a favorite holiday.

"We are informed there will be a Pic Nic in the Grove of woods near West Belleville on the 4th of July next on which occasion the Declaration of Independence will be read…In the evening a ball will be given at the 'Miners Arms' West Belleville." (34)

A review of that event appeared a week later in the *Belleville Advocate* and noted the Declaration of Independence was read by John Hinchcliffe, another English native who settled in Mascoutah as a tailor and who quickly became involved in community issues.

The *Belleville Democrat* reported December 21, 1861, an economic boost for the town of Mascoutah.

"A vein of coal opened up in Mascoutah, by Mr. John Lines, is found to be seven feet two inches thick, and of excellent quality. This discovery is the cause of great rejoicing in Mascoutah. A celebration will be held Christmas Eve with a parade made up of two Marshalls and a flagbearer, band, coaldiggers, orators of the day, citizens on foot, citizens on horseback, citizens in vehicles and two Marshalls… The route of procession will be down Mill Street to Peter Friederick's; thence North to the Catholic Church; thence West to the German Methodist Church; thence South to Mill Street; thence West to William Long's Ball Room, where supper will be served up at 6 p.m. At 7p.m. addresses will be delivered by John Hinchcliffe and S. M. Kase, Esqrs., After which the spacious Ball Room will be thrown open to DANCING."

As Hinchcliffe emerged as a labor activist in 1862, Weaver's role as union leader and spokesman

diminished as Weaver became co-owner of a mine at Freeburg. Hinchcliffe was named president of the MA and in 1863, he became editor of the MA's new coal mining newspaper, entitled *Weekly Miner.* The *Belleville Democrat* commented:

"This new paper made its appearance on Wednesday last, and has been received with decided favor, so far as we can learn, by the large and useful class of operatives to whose interests it is especially devoted." (35)

At about the time the *Weekly Miner* appeared, mine owners met in Chicago and "the Belleville field operators changed their attitude toward the MA from one of tolerance to a program of open hostility, with intent to eliminate it from the industry." (36) The upstate Illinois operators were ready to join the fight.

"By this time the Association lodges had been established throughout the Illinois coal fields, and a series of strikes in the northern part of the state, beginning

in December of 1862, and continuing in the first months of 1863, had thoroughly alarmed the operators." (37)

The *Belleville Democrat* published a letter May 2, 1863, from an anonymous MA miner who answered the formal resolutions adopted by the mine owners at their meetings in the first quarter of the year.

"This Association is composed of not only talent, but also of capital…that will astonish those that look upon a Coal Miner as if he was one of the most degraded of human beings upon the face of the earth. But, as I have just remarked, there is talent there, that will yet, I have not the least doubt, be heard in our Legislative halls, advocating the rights of the working man, instead of the nabobs of wealth advocating the oppression of the working man. This thing has been done long enough, and I would say here that those that are now in power must beware, how they use that power, for we have a mighty weapon, which is simply the Ballot Box, the most powerful weapon the citizens of this country are armed with, even sharper than a two edged sword…If they (mine owners) would give the Miner his rights in the weights and measures, it would have a great deal of effect in preventing the impoverishment of the Miner. Again, this convention passed another resolution, that on and after April 1, 1863, they would neither acknowledge, deal with, or hire, any member of any association of Miners, etc…but manage their mines to suit themselves, and discharge or hire men at their will. Now we do not expect them to manage their mines to suit us, but we will look to our Legislature to see after these men…Then another resolution that in all contracts made with Miners and Operators, there will be a clause inserted that the said Miner will not enter into or be a member of any association of Miners. In the name of God, what is this country coming to? On the one hand they are trying to set the black man free, and on the other hand they would like the Miner to sign away his freedom."

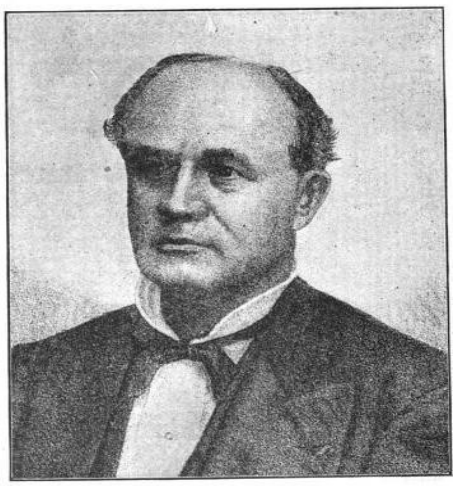
The 1863 strikes ended in a compromise acceptable to both sides.

The *Weekly Miner* played an important part in sharing information with miners in other states.

"We learn that the editor of the *Weekly Miner,* John Hinchcliffe, is about to make an extended trip through the coal mining regions of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and other States, on business connected with the publication of the journal under his control, and the interests of the coal miners generally." (38)

The union's name was changed from Miners' Association to the American Miners' Association to reflect its growth eastward, which made the AMA the first national labor union. The next issue the AMA championed was improving ventilation in mines to remove noxious gases. The Illinois Senate passed a bill, but it was killed in the Illinois House. "This was the first attempt in this country to secure legislation for the protection of miners in bituminous coal mines." (39)

British immigrants' ownership of mines at West Belleville outnumbered other nationalities. There were four British native owners and two British native coal dealers. German immigrants owned two mines, and one German was a coal dealer. (40)



JOHN HINCHCLIFFE.

The Belleville tract, located in the Herrin Coal Seam, ranged in depth from 40 feet to 200 feet with the vein varying from five and a half feet to seven and a half feet. Some of the mines near West Belleville were Brandenburger, Beatty and Baird, Harding and Emery, Reeb, Reeves, Irish Pond and West Belleville Mine. (41)

In 1864, a new company reflecting the ethnic majority of West Belleville went into business. "The German Miners Coal Company have now got their works in good working order. The shaft is situated on Bornmann's farm, near West Belleville. The company was formed in April last when they commenced to sink their shaft. They struck coal about six weeks ago and have already sent some coal down to the St. Louis market." (42)

The *Weekly Miner* under Hinchcliffe, promised to be the official organ of the AMA.

"It will be devoted to the advancement of the interests of the Working Class generally, and of the hitherto neglected Coal Miners especially. It will be devoted to family literature, Social Science, General Knowledge and the Current News of the day…It will be the advocate of no partisan schemes, but will fearlessly expose wrong, no matter by whom they are perpetrated, while the Right will be upheld and defended, irrespective of partisanship, at all hazard." (43) AMA membership grew to over 20,000 as the union expanded into Ohio and Pennsylvania. National conventions of the AMA were held in Cincinnati in 1864 and in Cleveland in 1865. Hinchcliffe's leadership of the *Weekly Miner* came under attack at the Cleveland

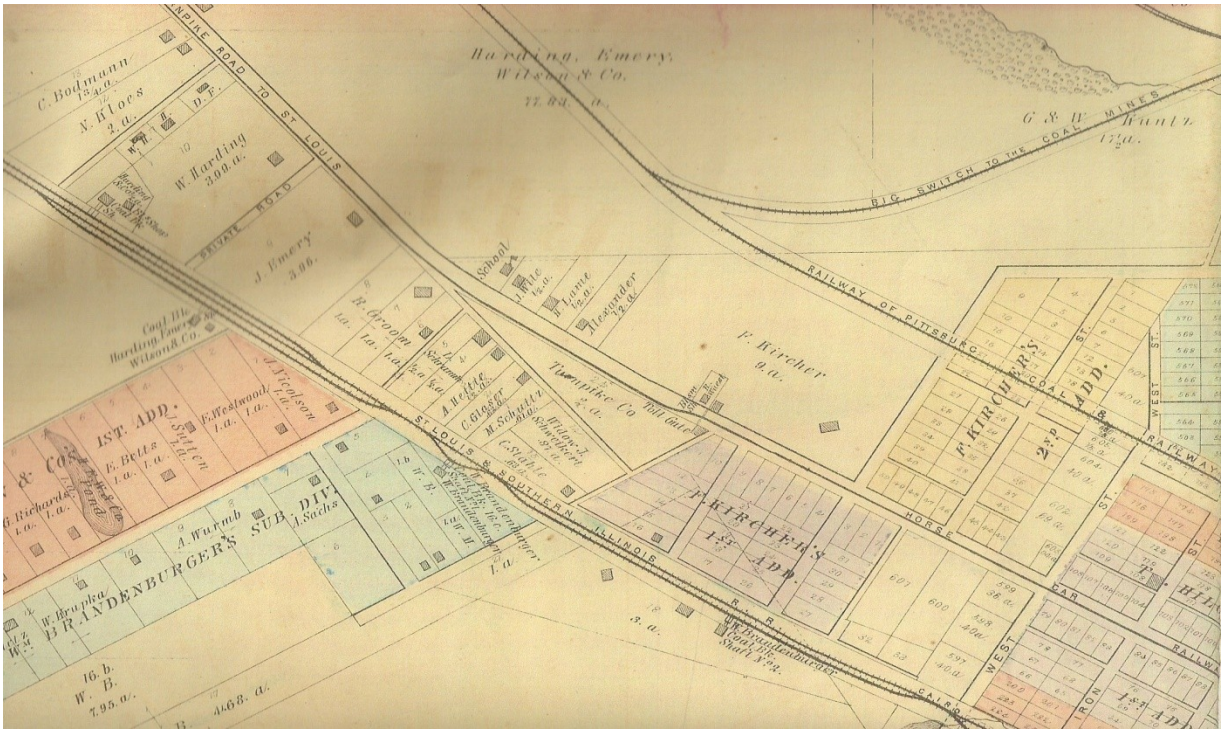
meeting. Hinchcliffe resigned from the paper citing differences with the AMA board. Hinchcliffe wrote in the *East St. Louis Sunday Herald*, September 3, 1865:

"Strange things happen sometimes…Resigning in the face of the action of nine men out of 22,000 who are under the whip and spur system of dragooning adopted by one of the nine, in aid of his malignant and ambitious but much devious purpose, rode down all precedents and rules of right for the purpose of annoying a man who is personally obnoxious to him, because he can not be made use of as a tool, by trifling, designing tricksters." (44)

The *Belleville Democrat* praised Hinchcliffe's performance.

"An intimate acquaintance with Mr. H for several years, has inspired us with the highest confidence in his integrity and honesty of purpose, and we have watched his course as conductor of the W*eekly Miner* with no little admiration for the zeal, judgment and ability displayed in his advocacy of the miners' cause." (45)

AMA lodges which supported Hinchcliffe's leadership refused to continue financial aid for the *Weekly Miner.* The newspaper dispute was a troubling sign of later negative developments in store for the AMA. Hinchcliffe published his own paper, *The Miner and Artisan,* in St. Louis from December of 1865 until July of 1866, but it failed to take hold. He moved to Belleville in 1867 to practice law and "appeared at the miners' meetings in the spring of 1868, during their effort to reorganize the Association and to get just weights, and served on the committee to settle that strike." (46)



The Belleville and Illinoistown Railroad entered West Belleville on the north side of West Main. A

spur, called Big Switch, curved north and ran behind Neu and Gintz Brewery, later Stag Brewery, to mines owned by John Kloess. The St. Louis and Southern Illinois Railroad paralleled West Main on the south side of West Belleville. The tollgate of the St. Clair Turnpike to St. Louis, located in the triangular wedge in the middle of the map, was at South Eighteenth and West Main. The *Belleville Advocate* estimated in 1865 seven million bushels of coal were hauled from Belleville to St. Louis on the rail lines.

William Bowen, an immigrant from South Wales, came to West Belleville in 1859 to work as a miner. He was elected secretary of the AMA in 1866. The United Mine Workers Journal of September 17, 1908, in an article entitled “Forty years a miner and men I have known,” said this of Bowen: “In 1869 Bowen had his eyes shot out by a premature blast of a slate shot in the mine. After that he learned broom making, which he followed for several years. He learned to play the violin and was a very welcome guest at every miners’ gathering which he visited to furnish them with music.”

Wages and unjust weights again arose as issues, six years after the law was passed which attempted to regulate weights and measures. The *Belleville Advocate* reported October 7, 1867:

"Miners at several points on the Belleville and Pittsburgh roads refused to work without an advance of wages. They have been receiving three and a half cents per bushel and now demand seven, declaring that this will not net them over five cents, as they say they are cheated by short measure. Some are willing to work at fifty cents per box, putting ten bushels to a box. Others demand seven cents, agreeing, however, to throw in one bushel for every nine."

The demise of the AMA *Weekly Miner* coincided with the end of the Civil War and pent-up economic conditions that affected a five month strike at Blossburg, Pennsylvania, resulting in the elimination of the AMA in that area. The national economy and internal union dissension had fatally weakened the AMA. The inflation of the war years loomed as a dark cloud over the national economy.

"The evil day was deferred until the panic of 1873 fell upon the country as an avalanche. But the decline in prices, gradual as they had been between the overthrow of the rebellion and the panic of 1873, led to the series of strikes which crippled and finally destroyed the national organization of miners called into being by the lofty address of the ideal Dan Weaver." (47)

By 1869, the AMA had imploded. But, miners had a new champion at the state capitol. John Hinchcliffe was elected to the legislature in 1871. He sponsored a bill, which was adopted, that improved enforcement of the Mine Sealer law, the habitual issue presented by miners since 1861. Hinchcliffe died in 1878. His eulogist said of him:

"His work in the field of miner legislation is outstanding, coming after the Association had ceased to exist, and it is the measure of the man that he did not harbor bitterness after his removal as editor, which he must have felt to be extremely unfair, but continued unabatedly to work for improvement of the conditions of the workers." (48)

Dan Weaver said of Hinchcliffe:

"He was always a friend of the workingman, and particularly of the miners, who elected him president pro tem of the AMA, although the constitution implicitly stated that none but a miner could hold the position of president. He was a prominent temperance advocate and one of the best speeches he ever made was on that subject." (49)

Several labor organizations tried to fill the void after the AMA and none had staying-power until the United Mine Workers Union was established in 1890. The UMWA recognizes its kinship with the AMA.

"Growing out of a strike protesting against wage reductions, the American Miners' Association was the militant granddaddy of the United Mine Workers of America. That pioneer national Union was a product of the industrial revolution then opening a new chapter in American history. This early Union was called upon to solve such familiar problems as recurring recessions, unemployment, wage reductions, and insecurity of living standards. The American Miners' Association is linked with the United Mine Workers of America because, despite the span of years separating them, both felt a concern for the same social and economic conditions spewed by industrialism…The American Miners' Association was unique because in outlook and policy it was ahead of the typical labor union of its time, in the 1860's. It built its membership to about 20,000 miners and laborers. From this plateau it gradually declined, unable to survive the post-Civil War period of economic readjustment. More specifically, the American Miners' Association could not afford the luxury of dissension that broke out only a few months after the end of the Civil War. It thus passed into history – and oblivion. Only a few local lodges survived after 1867." (50)

Edward Wieck, born in 1884 at Staunton, Illinois, worked as a miner for nine years and then became active in the United Mine Workers of America. In 1934, he was appointed Research Associate in the Department of Industrial Studies of the Russell Sage Foundation and authored a book on the American Miners' Association in 1940. Wieck's other labor articles detailed automobile workers, the steel industry, wage controls in wartime and numerous articles on unions and strikes. His papers are stored in 18 boxes at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, Michigan.

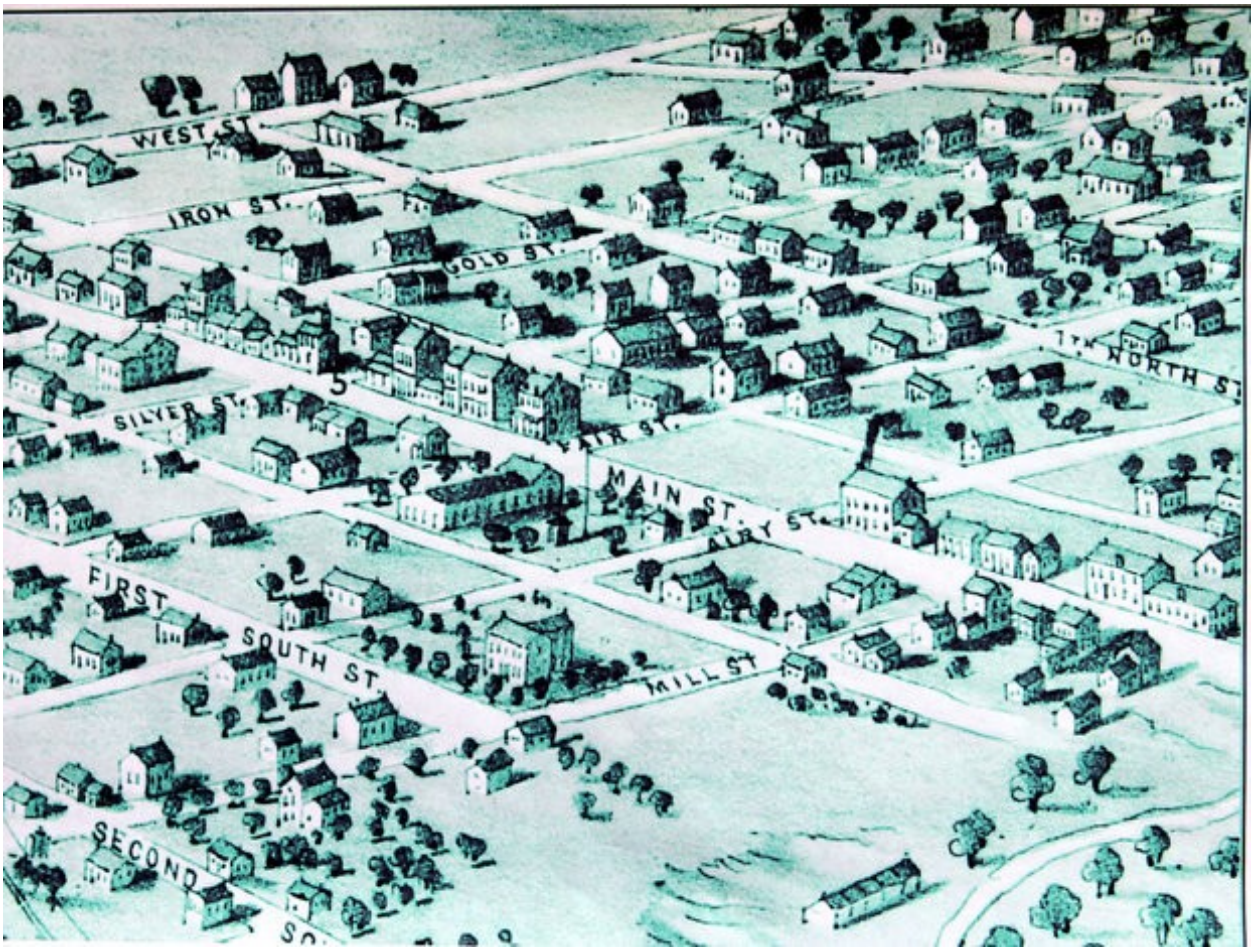
The AMA established a template for other unions which would follow, according to Wieck.

"It was forehanded in organizing; it aggressively asserted and maintained the right of workingmen to organize; it won wage increases; it fought for legislation to protect miners in the mines; it formulated principles and policies and laid the foundation for future organizations among the miners. And by its example, it encouraged organization among all workers." (51)

Wieck emphasized the importance of the strike in West Belleville.

"From that strike in 1861 in Illinois grew the American Miners' Association, which may justly claim to have initiated the modern labor movement in the United States." (52)

The town of West Belleville, population 2,700, was annexed to Belleville in 1882. West Belleville was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2014 with the support of Mayor Mark Eckert, Belleville City Council and Belleville Historic Preservation Commission. The district's significance is demonstrated by the predominant German immigrant population that settled in West Belleville, the district's extant German Street House architecture and West Belleville's role in labor history.



This 1867 map of West Belleville identifies original north-south street names where they intersect with West Main. Starting with today's Eighth Street, in ascending order, the street names are Mill, Airy, Fair, Silver, Gold, Iron and West.

Notes

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Map of West Belleville with railroads, *1874 Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Clair County,* Warner and Beers (Chicago: Warner and Beers, 1874)

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